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ABSTRACT

A federally funded project at the University of Alabama, Project Growth, was developed in response to the need for more participation by women and minorities in educational research and leadership. The project emphasizes both professional and personal growth experiences, with broad exposure to a variety of research topics. A comprehensive, specifically formulated search strategy is used to recruit pre- and post-doctoral scholars as candidates for the 1-year project. Stipends are offered, and personal and professional growth contracts are required of each participant. Program activities include workshops, seminars, practice information interviews, and attendance at local, state, and national professional meetings. Individualized programs of work, study, and writing are developed for each scholar, and opportunities are provided to refine speaking and presentation skills. Scholars are urged to expand their expectations and goals and to find one or more mentors to assist them in proposal development and in finding employment. Project Growth has succeeded in recruiting and training women and minority scholars who are now in leadership positions, through a low-cost program that has benefited both the university and the education profession. (FG)

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A
Paper
Prepared by

Thomas Diener and Otis Holloway Owens
Project Growth Co-Directors

March, 1982

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Project Growth: A Program
at The University of Alabama for the Identification
and Support of Women and Minorities
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Educational Research and Leadership
by
Thomas Diener and Otis Holloway Owens

An Abstract

Responding to the need for more women and minorities in educational research and leadership, the Institute of Higher Education Research and Services of The University of Alabama designed and implemented a five-year program of professional development (Project Growth) starting in 1978.

This Project provided stipends for pre- and post-doctoral scholars, a physical location for study and reflection, a large community of scholars who supported and challenged one another, access to mentors, participation and training in research planning, design, and implementation and opportunities to travel and contribute to state, regional, and national professional meetings.

A unique and experimental feature of the Project was its emphasis on personal growth as well as professional development. Exercises in goal setting and achievement, time uses, value clarification, and interpersonal relationships were as important to Project participants as skill development in quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Project Growth served both as the positive expression of a major state university on behalf of affirmative recruitment and support of minorities and women in educational research and a vehicle by which the institution itself was challenged to increase its sensitivity to and financial organizational support of these future leaders.

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The Problem

The problem of the underrepresentation of women and minority researchers as documented, for example, in the October 1975 issue of Educational Researcher was of such magnitude that the National Institute of Education (NIE) received the following mandate from its statutory policymaking body, the National Council on Educational Research:

> It shall be the policy of the NIE to increase the participation of minority persons and women in the research and development (R and D) efforts of the nation through ensuring that quality minority firms and individuals and qualified women are given informed opportunity to participate in NIE programs, and through efforts to increase the numbers, qualifications and performance of minority firms and individuals, and women engaged in education R and D.

When staff at the Institute of Higher Education Research and Services (IHERS) of The University of Alabama reviewed college directories and agency personnel lists for the Southeast they found a national problem reflected at the regional level. The situation would improve only when policy-makers in government and education undertook specific actions and programs to prepare minorities and women for entry, reentry, or advancement in the field of educational R and D.

The comparatively small numbers of minorities and women receiving doctorates in education from major southern universities further illustrated the nature of the problem. Minorities and women were similarly underrepresented in doctoral level programs at institutions which prepared

them with the academic training and credentials for educational research positions.

A case in point was The University of Alabama, a major supplier of educational research personnel for the State of Alabama, the Southeast, and, to a lesser extent, the nation. Of a total of 50 doctoral degrees (Ed.D. and Ph.D.) awarded in education in May, 1978, only 21 went to women and one went to minorities. Figures for previous years were no better. During no single year had minorities and women received terminal degrees proportionate to the numbers enrolled in the University's undergraduate schools.

Recent minorities and women doctorates and professionals in education and related fields needed the time, exposure, and opportunity to make the contributions which could affect the directions of educational research. For the nation to reap the potential benefits of educational research undertaken by minorities and women, it was imperative to create situations conducive to thoughtful, quality research. Therefore the Institute structured such an environment including the following elements:

(1) a financial support system to provide sustenance

(2) nutrients for growth (in the form of training or retraining with provisions for careful evaluation, equal perquisites of rank, and work with peers)

(3) time for development

(4) access to mentors

(5) absence of undue stress

(6) commitment of those involved, trainers, counselors, and fellow scholars.

A University of Alabama Strategy: Project Growth

During a three-year period (1978-81) IHERS, with NIE and University of Alabama support, provided the optimal situation for the growth and development of selected participants. During a subsequent two-year period (1981-83) The Institute is continuing follow-up activities and conducting a longitudinal study of Project activities and participants. IHERS Project Growth goals are to:

(1) provide opportunities for advanced study and research of educational problems of major significance

(2) demonstrate institutional policies and practices that strengthen involvement, professional growth, and opportunity for advancement of minority persons and women involved in educational research

(3) increase and disseminate knowledge on steps to achieving the foregoing purposes.

The distinctiveness of the IHERS program lay in its emphasis upon growth experiences of both a personal and professional nature for emerging leaders in educational research. As the Alabama Center of Human Potential Seminar, the Institute occupied a unique vantage point from which to view and assist the development of educational researchers.

Since the establishment of the Center at the Institute in 1975, it became clearly evident to the Institute staff that professional skill development must be accompanied by human skill development. Quantitative research skills must be supported by the development of skills in self-development and interpersonal relationships.

Due particularly to the traditional socialization of minorities and women, it is extremely important for members of these two groups to develop positive and expanded perceptions of their merits and abilities in order to enter existing networks and to make the contributions to

educational research which would affect changes in higher education. Human potential development, therefore, figured as a vital element in the successful realization of the goals of the Project.

The two other major foci of the Project are (1) the establishment of professional linkages (by participants) and the integration of participants in research, recruitment, and dissemination networks, and (2) the development of research skills with emphasis upon both quantitative skills and those necessary for action-oriented inquiry.

The Project has encouraged investigation of traditional and non-traditional research topics, enabling participants to influence the type, direction, and methodology of research. Educational research, it was felt, was not limited to a single set of similar questions, nor did it have any single systematic scheme for answering them. Questions in education referred to many widely differing activities and problems: teaching and learning, administration, curriculum building, public relations, social policy, and a host of others.

Through an eclectic approach and in an environment which fosters personal growth and development, the Institute staff continues to achieve the following objectives:

(1) increase the numbers of minorities and women for significant participation and leadership in education research.

(2) provide participants with broad exposure to a variety of possible research topics which are traditional as well as nontraditional in nature.

(3) foster opportunities for minorities and women to influence the type and direction of research.

(4) create a desirable environment for participants to develop significant relationships with mentors.

(5) facilitate the entry of participants into existing sponsorship networks relevant to educational research.

(6) increase the number of publication and dissemination avenues for participants.

(7) clarify and gain acceptance for non-traditional topics and approaches in educational research.

(8) define issues and methodologies that bring new perspectives on educational problems that effect minorities and women.

(9) enable participants to engage in the development of their human potential, i.e., personal growth in unison with professional growth.

(10) demonstrate how changes that enhance participation of minority persons and women can become an ongoing part of The University of Alabama and other state and regional agencies and organizations.

Since its organization, IHERS, as an educational research and service arm of The University of Alabama, has established a reputation for significant quality research. For example, in the 1970s the Carnegie Corporation of New York awarded IHERS two grants totaling $361,800 to assist it in the development of higher education in the region through research and training programs. The Institute gave particular attention to developing and strengthening personnel, programs, and institutions in Alabama and the Southeast.

The record of the Institute itself in the employment of minorities and women has been exemplary. Since its inception in 1970 the majority of internships and research positions available at IHERS have been filled with minorities and women. Included among the Institute's alums are key decision-makers and educational researchers in the Southeast.

Project Growth provided a significant new program by which to directly advance the participation of minorities and women in educational research and leadership. It has also served as a model program to stimulate the participation of women and minorities in leadership posts at The University of Alabama and other higher education institutions.

Project Growth Activities

More specifically, what did the Project do?

1. A precise yet comprehensive search was made of institutions and agencies throughout the Southeast and the nation, of women's groups, black colleges, and organizations specially aware of potential candidates for such a program. The usual techniques for recruiting white males are not always useful in recruiting minorities and women.

Using letters, public notices, telephone inquiries, announcements at conferences and seminars, and word-of-mouth the Project did alert and identify a sizable number of potential candidates. The Project demonstrated that minority and women professionals with excellent credentials did exist and could be located.

2. Selection criteria included not only the usual record of academic achievement but an essay by the candidate of personal and professional aspirations, expectations, and potential benefit from the Project. Candidates had to be willing to work hard to prepare for success in new research and leadership posts.

3. Stipends were offered, thereby permitting few individuals the "luxury" of a year's full-time work in research and writing. Others permitted scholars to pursue their doctorate full time Some scholars with smaller stipends were willing to commit significant portions of their savings or earnings to prepare for professional advancement through the Project.

4. Personal and professional growth contracts were required of each participant. This exercise guided each scholar to clearly define goals, activities, and expectations for each year of the Project and the resources needed to reach those goals. The contracts were reviewed by Institute staff and agreed to by both the scholar and the Project staff.

This exercise has been one of the most productive used by the Project. The relationship between careful contract development and scholar productivity has proven to be extremely high.

5. Personal growth activities were an important part of the overall Project. Exercises to encourage and support self-concept development, goal clarification, and interpersonal relations--all aspects of personal development--formed a firm basis for professional development.

Scholars kept journals or diaries of their participation in the Project as well as chronofiles--depositories of the notes, announcements, and other memorabilia relevant to a scholar's life. These provided a useful way of recording Project events day by day. They also were used to reflect upon the feelings and moods of scholars and their perceptions of life while in Project Growth. Journal keeping provided useful material for periodic counseling sessions with Project staff.

6. Workshops, seminars and weekly meetings helped reinforce the concept of community for scholars. They had regular opportunities to share their joys and sorrows, pass information along to one another, be briefed on coming events, evaluate current or past activities, and be exposed to practioners and theoreticians from various disciplines.

7. Practice information interviews were held. Scholars were matched with top-level University of Alabama administrators. In these sessions the scholars learned to present themselves, their work, and Project Growth. Scholars learned how persons with similar training and experiences are used within a major university. Scholars also learned how persons with their skills and interests might be employed in the future.

8. Individualized programs of work, study and writing were developed for each scholar. Although many activities were common to all scholars

(the quarterly workshops, for example), each scholar followed a personally developed program of work and study--one uniquely designed by the scholar and Project staff.

9. Opportunities for practice were plentiful. This might mean presenting a research proposal before a panel of experts, it might mean speaking on television about a research topic, or it might mean defining a piece of research and presenting the findings to the entire group of scholars. Speaking, writing, presentations (formal and informal), defending or explaining points of view...whatever the task, the Project provided a critical yet caring environment in which to test and exercise one's skills and attitudes.

10. Attendance at and participation in professional meetings was a significant part of this Project. For far too many women and minorities, limited money and limited time, and interestingly enough, sometimes a limited view of the importance of professional association with colleagues often prevents them from using the professional meeting for personal and professional growth. Project Growth removed some of those limitations.

11. Rising expectations and achievements were cultivated. Scholars were urged to expand the concepts of what they could do professionally and where.

They quickly became presenters at regional and national conferences, writers of papers for significant journals

Scholars learned excellence in dissertation research. One scholar had her dissertation chosen as best in the nation by a noted educational organization, receiving a money award and an opportunity to present her research before a national forum.

12. Scholars learned about the care and nuturance of mentors. Each scholar was urged to find one or more persons, national leaders in research,

for example, who might assist them develop a research proposal--or find a job! The use and potential support of mentors were significant parts of career advancement that most scholars had not known until Project Growth.

Results--and Conclusions

One, the Project did succeed in identifying, recruiting, and selecting a variety of excellent talent from among women and minorities.

The first year, 14 pre- and post-doctoral, special and sabbatical scholars joined the program. That number was nearly doubled in the second year. By 1980-81, 32 scholars were part of the Project with additional participants being added in early 1982.

The underemployment of talented women and minorities certainly does exist. This Project produced additional evidence of that well known fact. This Project alone could not be a complete remedy to that condition but it did show that, with encouragement and training, women and minorities could become more visible, could be appointed to positions more nearly challenging the upper limits of their gifts and skills, and could be far more productive as educational researchers.

Scholars of this Project are now division heads, teacher educators, private consultants, and professional leaders; their experiences in Project Growth did produce results.

Two, Project Growth has demonstrated that attention to the emotional and attitudinal aspects of individuals lives pays rich dividends. As a person becomes more confident, more secure is his or her abilities, more precise in goal definition and personal planning, the odds increase greatly that the individual can rapidly develop in professional skills

and stature. Cognitive development is important but it is certainly not the sole area to be addressed in professional development programs of this type.

Three, professional achievement can escalate quite rapidly. Women and minorities, this Project demonstrated, can write, present, conduct research, and enter the realms of educational leadership quickly and with great success. Knowledge and use of the politics of career advancement is often more important than discipline expertise per se.

Four, the clues to career (and personal) advancement are not mysterious. They are known. They can be taught and learned.

But how-to books, scholarly treaties, and learned monographs on motivation, career achievement, leadership, and research techniques are not sufficient.

A combination of institutional commitment to find and support individuals with high potential, encouragement over a sustained period of time, and personal coaching are all necessary ingredients in a comprehensive plan dedicated to human resource development.

Five, a significant program of professional development is not necessarily related to the number of dollars involved. A good program need not cost a great deal of money.

Basic financial support for staff and scholars is necessary. Stipends for scholars are useful and, at times, absolutely required to keep a scholar moving toward professional goals.

Generous stipends alone do not make a superior program.

A strong professional development program needs a core staff which gives it stability and direction. It needs a core of financing to give it strength and flexibility in the management of that financing to meet

quickly individual human need. It needs, above all, a dedication to the proposition that women and minorities have talents which can be used more widely and productively in our society than they are at present.

Six, The University of Alabama itself experienced positive changes.

The graduate school enrolled new and excellent minority and women students. Some students who might otherwise have delayed graduation or could not have enrolled at all, stayed in school and advanced quickly toward the doctorate.

The graduate school directed additional institutional scholarship money toward promising women and minority graduate and professional students.

Major administrative and faculty leaders from throughout the University--because of their involvement as counselors, mentors, members of a Project advising committee, research evaluators and critics--gained a heightened awareness of the part women and minorities can play in higher education.

The office of academic affairs provided funds directly to the Institute for the continuation of quarterly research workshops and other activities of Project Growth.

University of Alabama faculty members have used the opportunities offered by the Project to enhance their professional growth. Through participation in the Project, individual faculty have increased their publications record and made improvements in the areas of academic preparation and classroom instruction. Thus, for some faculty the Project has served as a mechanism for faculty development.

The University, through its upper level administrators, recognized the Project as a focus for services to women and minorities. As

recognition of the value of the Project, the University has enhanced its image as an institution dedicated to providing services to women and minorities.

In summary, The University of Alabama now ensures, through the services of the Project, significantly increased opportunities for women and minorities in educational research and leadership. Of particular note are the participant stipends and staff salaries provided by the University. The University now supports strong efforts to inform minorities about opportunities for conducting research and presenting research findings at professional meetings and in publications. Finally, the University supports a Project staff which continues, now on a permanent basis, to counsel women and minorities as they advance toward positions of leadership in education in Alabama and the South.

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